United Nations S/2017/867

Security Council

Distr.: General
16 October 2017

Original: English

Twenty-sixth semi-annual report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004)

1. The present report is the twenty-sixth semi-annual report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004). It provides a review and an assessment of the implementation of the resolution since my previous report on the subject, which was issued on 28 April 2017 (S/2017/374), and covers developments up to 27 September.

I. Implementation of resolution 1559 (2004)

2. Since the adoption of resolution 1559 (2004) by the Security Council on 2 September 2004, several of its provisions have been implemented, as highlighted in previous reports. However, a number of provisions, including the existence and activities of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, remain pending. Progress continues to be affected by the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic.

A. Sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon

3. With the adoption of resolution 1559 (2004), the Security Council aimed at strengthening the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon under the sole and exclusive authority of the Government of Lebanon throughout the country, in accordance with the Taif Accords of 1989, to which all the political parties in Lebanon had committed themselves. That objective has remained the priority of my efforts.

4. After several months of discussions on a new electoral law, an agreement on principles was reached among political leaders. A law was passed by Parliament on 16 June 2017, shortly before the expiration of its term on 20 June. The agreed law is a proportional system with preferential voting. The proposal for a gender quota, supported by some political forces, was not retained. As a result of that agreement, the Parliament's term was extended by 11 months until May 2018. On 16 June, the International Support Group for Lebanon in Beirut issued a statement welcoming the agreement as "a further step towards the reactivation of Lebanon's institutions of State and the normalization of Lebanese political life".

5. The Government took some steps during the reporting period to address outstanding governance issues. On 24 May, the Cabinet renewed the term of Central

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Bank Governor Riad Salameh for another six-year period. On 20 July, the Cabinet agreed on a substantial number of appointments for key diplomatic positions. On 21 August, the President of Lebanon, Michel Aoun, signed two bills, on salary scale and taxes, respectively. On 24 August, the Cabinet approved a controversial electricity plan during a session chaired by the President. There were no further dialogue sessions between the Future Movement and Hizbullah during the reporting period, but discussions between the two parties continued in the Cabinet on a regular basis.

6. In recent months, the debate among political leaders with regard to the normalization of the country's relations with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has gained prominence, with views falling along traditional political lines. In that context, and further to an invitation by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to some Lebanese ministers to attend the Damascus International Fair, on 9 August the Prime Minister of Lebanon, Saad Hariri, stressed the importance of the country's policy of disassociation and reportedly clarified that any such visits would be made in a personal capacity, in the absence of an endorsement by the Council of Ministers. On 16 and 17 August, the Minister for Industry, Hussein Hajj Hasan, the Minister for Agriculture, Ghazi Zeaiter, and the Minister for Transport and Public Works, Youssef Finianos, attended the Fair. Mr. Hajj Hasan emphasized the official nature of the visit.

7. The number of registered refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic hosted by Lebanon remained at slightly more than 1 million. The Lebanon component of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan is currently 29 per cent funded, with $557 million received of a total appeal for just over $2 billion. On 14 July, the Prime Minister convened the second meeting of a high-level steering committee tasked with addressing tensions between Lebanese and Syrian refugee communities, which also discussed the follow-up from the Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region held in April 2017.

8. In its resolution 1680 (2006), the Security Council strongly encouraged the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to respond positively to the request of the Government of Lebanon to delineate their common border. That remains critical to enabling proper border control and management, including the movement of people and the potential movements of arms. Progress remained difficult to achieve, in part due to the ongoing conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic.

9. The delineation and demarcation of the boundaries of Lebanon remain elements essential to guaranteeing national sovereignty and territorial integrity. While border delineation is a bilateral matter, progress on the issue remains an obligation for Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1680 (2006).

10. Cross-border violations of Lebanese sovereignty and territorial integrity continued on the eastern and northern borders. Between May and July, Syrian military aircraft reportedly conducted 19 airstrikes against militants in the outskirts of Arsal, in an area where the Lebanese-Syrian border is not delineated, causing no casualties. There were reports of three cross-border shooting incidents and six incidents of shelling from the Syrian Arab Republic.

11. In violation of the sovereignty of Lebanon and resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006), Israel continued to occupy the northern part of the village of Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line.

12. There was no progress in relation to the issue of the Shab'a Farms area during the reporting period. Furthermore, neither the Syrian Arab Republic nor Israel has responded in regard to the provisional definition of the area contained in my report

on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) issued on 30 October 2007 (S/2007/641).

13. Unmanned aerial vehicles and fixed-wing aircraft, including fighter jets of the Israel Defense Forces, continued to make almost daily overflights of Lebanon during the reporting period, in violation of Lebanese sovereignty and Security Council resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). In identical letters dated 19 June 2017 addressed to me and the President of the Security Council (A/71/944-S/2017/523), the Permanent Representative of Lebanon stated that "Israel also persists in encroaching on the daily lives, livelihoods and security of Lebanese civilians with surveillance towers and listening devices all along the southern border". In identical letters dated 8 September 2017 addressed to me and the President of the Security Council, the Permanent Representative stated that Israeli warplanes had violated Lebanese airspace the day prior, using Lebanese airspace to strike targets in the Syrian Arab Republic. In identical letters dated 11 September 2017 addressed to me and the President of the Security Council, the Permanent Representative stated that, on 10 September 2017, Israeli warplanes had violated Lebanese airspace, breaking the sound barrier over the city of Sidon, which he said was intended to terrorize peaceable inhabitants of the area.

B. Extension of control of the Government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory

14. The Lebanese Armed Forces stepped up its efforts to protect the country's stability and extend State authority throughout its territory during the reporting period. However, that endeavour continued to be challenged, as Lebanese citizens, including members of Hizbullah, remained involved in the fighting in the Syrian Arab Republic, and Hizbullah was reported to have conducted military operations on Lebanese territory during the reporting period.

15. Against the backdrop of what he said were "positive developments in Syria close to the Lebanese border", which was now empty of armed militants, the Secretary-General of Hizbullah, Hassan Nasrallah, announced in a public speech on 11 May that Hizbullah was dismantling all its positions on the Lebanese side of the border, as its mission had been accomplished, noting that from now on, the responsibility would be that of the State. He also noted, however, that Hizbullah would remain on the Syrian side of the border, where it would coordinate with the Syrian army to avoid any militant infiltration towards Lebanon.

16. The Lebanese Armed Forces continued to prevent, pre-empt and respond to threats to the country's stability. On 24 April, in an operation involving the use of heavy artillery in the outskirts of Qa' and Ra's Baalbek at the north-east border with the Syrian Arab Republic, the Lebanese Armed Forces reportedly killed or wounded 20 militants from Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Clashes also continued between Hizbullah and other militant groups. On 24 April, Hizbullah forces reportedly destroyed an ISIL field command centre in the outskirts of Ra's Baalbek. On 27 May, clashes between militants from ISIL and Jabhat Fath al-Sham in the outskirts of Arsal, involving the use of heavy weaponry, reportedly resulted in multiple deaths and injuries among militants. On 11 July, a raid by the Lebanese Armed Forces in Arsal reportedly resulted in the deaths of two alleged terrorists, the arrest of three others and the confiscation of bombs and other explosives.

17. On 30 June, during what the Lebanese Armed Forces said was a pre-emptive security operation in some of the Syrian refugee settlements in Arsal, five separate suicide bombings and a hand grenade attack lightly injured seven soldiers. As a result, the Lebanese Armed Forces conducted a vast raid that resulted in the arrest of

356 individuals for interrogation. One Syrian child was reportedly killed in the context of the operation. While in the custody of the Lebanese Armed Forces, four Syrian detainees died. On 4 July, the Directorate of Orientation of the Lebanese Armed Forces stated that the four detainees "suffered from chronic health issues that were aggravated due to the climate condition" and had died before being interrogated. On 5 July, the regional representative of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) expressed the Office's deep concern about the death of the four detainees during the investigation process, and called for a transparent, prompt, effective and independent investigation and for accountability, if necessary. OHCHR sent a follow-up letter to the General Prosecutor of Lebanon to that same end. A military investigation reportedly concluded on 24 July that the four individuals had died from health complications. The details of the medical report have not yet been made public. On 26 July, the President stated that "Lebanon takes the necessary measures to prevent torture in all its forms". On 19 September, the Lebanese Parliament passed a law that criminalized torture.

18. On 21 July, Hizbullah reportedly started an operation against Islamist militants from Saraya Ahl al-Sham and from Jabhat Fath al-Sham, a terrorist group listed by the Security Council, in the outskirts of Arsal on the Lebanese side and on the Syrian side of the border. The Syrian Arab Armed Forces reportedly conducted air strikes in the outskirts of Arsal from 7 to 25 July. At the time of the Hizbullah-led operation, the Lebanese Armed Forces also conducted operations that it stated were aimed at preventing the infiltration of militants from the outskirts of Arsal into the town of Arsal or the refugee encampments surrounding it. On 27 July, a ceasefire between Hizbullah and Jabhat Fath al-Sham entered into force. The ceasefire deal involved the departure of Jabhat Fath al-Sham militants and their families to Idlib province in the Syrian Arab Republic. In speeches on 26 July and 4 August, Mr. Nasrallah praised the Syrian army for its collaboration, from the Syrian side, in the battle of Arsal, including in reaching the ceasefire deal. In both speeches, he also stated that Hizbullah was "ready to restore all the territories" that had been liberated to the army.

19. Further to the agreement reached, on 2 August, according to media reports, between 4,500 and 7,500 individuals, including Jabhat Fath al-Sham militants and their families, left for multiple locations across the north-western part of the Syrian Arab Republic, under the supervision of the General Directorate of General Security and the Lebanese army. On the same day, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Lebanon issued a statement confirming that the Office was not part of the agreement underlying the returns and was not involved in the movement. On 14 August, the General Directorate of General Security released a statement confirming "the completion of the departure of gunmen who had occupied parts of the Lebanese territory on the outskirts of Arsal, following negotiations that the Directorate had made with the concerned sides".

20. Ahead of a planned offensive by the Lebanese Armed Forces, the President called a meeting of the Higher Defence Council on 8 August. On 19 August, the Lebanese Armed Forces launched operation "Dawn of the Outskirts" in the vicinity of Ra's Baalbek and Qa'. Shortly thereafter, Hizbullah announced that its combatants, along with the Syrian army, had started implementing an operation to "liberate the outskirts of the Western Qalamun from Daesh terrorists". That same day, the Director of the Orientation Directorate of the Lebanese Army Command stated that the Lebanese Armed Forces was not coordinating with Hizbullah and the Syrian army "either directly or indirectly". On 23 August, during a visit to the operation's military command centre in Ra's Baalbek and Arsal, the Prime Minister stated that the Lebanese Armed Forces was responsible for protecting Lebanese

borders and reaffirmed that there was no coordination between the Armed Forces and the Syrian military.

21. On 22 August, the International Support Group for Lebanon reiterated the Group's strong and unanimous support for the Lebanese Armed Forces as the defender of Lebanon. On 27 August, the Lebanese Armed Forces declared a ceasefire in its operations, with a view to allowing time for negotiations to recover the remains of the nine soldiers from the Lebanese Armed Forces captured in Arsal in 2014. Shortly thereafter, the Lebanese Armed Forces found the remains of nine bodies, which were later confirmed to be those of the abducted soldiers. On 28 August, as part of a deal negotiated between ISIL and Hizbullah, some 600 militants and their families reportedly departed from Lebanon towards the Syrian Governorate of Dayr al-Zawr. In that connection, the Lebanon General Director of General Security, Abbas Ibrahim, reportedly stated on the same day that "Hizbullah negotiated with the Syrian Government and we were the third party in the negotiations".

22. On 30 August, the President of Lebanon declared the country's "victory over terrorism", while the Commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces, Joseph Aoun, announced that the battle had achieved its objectives, namely the expulsion of ISIL and uncovering the fate of the abducted military servicemen. Over the course of the "Dawn of the Outskirts" operation, seven soldiers from the Lebanese Armed Forces were reportedly killed and a dozen were wounded.

23. As a result of the operation, the Lebanese Armed Forces substantially extended its control over the territory of Lebanon. In a ceremony to honour fallen soldiers on 8 September, the Commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces stated that the army would "deploy from now on all along the eastern borders to defend it". On 22 September, the Lebanese Armed Forces stated that a military contingent had completed its deployment "south of the Litani River, upon the instructions of the army command to reinforce the deployment of the army along the southern border", in accordance with resolution 1701 (2006).

24. Support was sustained to build the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces. On 17 May, the Cabinet approved the enlistment of 2,000 recruits. The visit of the Prime Minister to Washington, D.C., on 24 July, included a focus on "Lebanon's interest in maintaining stability" and "strengthening the Lebanese army". In its statement of 22 August, the International Support Group for Lebanon called for continued international support to further strengthen the Lebanese Armed Forces capabilities. I similarly emphasized the importance of reinforcing the Lebanese Armed Forces and called on donors to support Lebanon so it could strengthen its institutions, most notably its army, in a press conference on 13 September.

C. Disbanding and disarmament of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias

25. In its resolution 1559 (2004), the Security Council called for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, a key provision of the resolution that has yet to be implemented. The provision reflects and reaffirms a decision to which all Lebanese committed themselves in the Taif Accords. It is critical that the Accords be preserved and implemented by all in order to avoid the spectre of a renewed confrontation among Lebanese citizens and to strengthen the institutions of the State. The Lebanese State should pursue its efforts to achieve a monopoly on the possession of weapons and the use of force throughout its territory.

26. Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias within the country continued to operate outside the control of the Government, in violation of resolution 1559 (2004). While several groups across the political spectrum in Lebanon possess weapons outside

Government control, Hizbullah is the most heavily armed militia in the country. In a democratic State, it remains a fundamental anomaly that a political party maintains a militia that has no accountability to the democratic, governmental institutions of the State and that has the power to take that State to war without any oversight. The maintenance of arms and alleged increase in arsenals by Hizbullah and other groups pose a serious challenge to the State's ability to exercise full sovereignty and authority over its territory. In addition, several Palestinian armed groups continued to operate in the country, inside and outside the Palestine refugee camps.

27. There has been no tangible progress towards the disbanding and disarming of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, as called for in the Taif Accords and resolution 1559 (2004). Since the adoption of that resolution, no specific steps have been taken to tackle that crucial issue, which lies at the heart of the sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon. The maintenance by Hizbullah of a military arsenal outside of a legal framework and its involvement in the Syrian Arab Republic continued to be denounced by a number of voices in Lebanon, who consider those issues to be destabilizing factors in the country and ones that undermine democracy. Many Lebanese see the continued presence of such arms as an implicit threat for use within Lebanon for political reasons.

28. During the reporting period, Hizbullah reportedly was involved in negotiating and securing a number of other agreements involving the return of combatants and a number of refugees to areas in the Syrian Arab Republic. On 10 June, according to a statement by the Lebanese army, "more than 50 Syrian refugee families" left Arsal for the town of Assal al-Ward in the Syrian Arab Republic, "accompanied by Lebanese army units until the last military checkpoint on the outskirts of Arsal". That was allegedly part of an agreement brokered by Hizbullah with some Syrian armed opposition groups. On 12 July, another agreement that had allegedly been reached between Hizbullah and such groups was reported to have resulted in the return of 106 individuals from Arsal to Assal al-Ward. While a number of refugees joined those movements to the Syrian Arab Republic, which were aimed at the evacuation of militants, the underlying agreements were not civilian-driven and should not set the standard for future refugee return movements. The United Nations was not involved in the return process.

29. Mutual accusations of violations of resolution 1701 (2006), some of which would also be a violation of resolution 1559 (2004), continued. As referenced in my latest report on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) (S/2017/591), the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations alleged in identical letters dated 20 June 2017 addressed to me and the President of the Security Council (S/2017/526) that Hizbullah had "established observation posts near the Blue Line" under the guise of an agricultural non-governmental organization. Referencing that letter, the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Lebanon stated, in identical letters dated 9 August 2017 addressed to me and the President of the Security Council (A/71/1031-S/2017/705), that the claims by Israel provided the clearest evidence of Israeli spying activities, in blatant contradiction to resolution 1701 (2006). The Chargé d'affaires a.i. also stated that the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) had "confirmed that this association is involved in forestry activity", and alleged that the Israeli allegations were "part of the efforts of Israel to divert international attention from its repeated violations of Lebanese sovereignty".

30. On 21 July, Kuwait reportedly sent a letter of protest to the Lebanese Government regarding the verdict issued in Kuwait in 2015 regarding the alleged involvement of Hizbullah in training Kuwaiti individuals to carry out acts harmful to the security of Kuwait (the so-called Abdali cell), a claim which was denied by

Hizbullah. During his visit to Kuwait on 13 August, the Prime Minister of Lebanon condemned the Abdali cell and stated his country's readiness to cooperate.

31. The Prime Minister reiterated the commitment of Lebanon to the disassociation policy during the reporting period. However, the participation of Hizbullah and other Lebanese groups in the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic continued to run counter to that policy. Furthermore, in a speech on 23 June, the Secretary-General of Hizbullah stated that, in the event of a new conflict with Israel, the door would open for tens of thousands of mujahidin from the Arab and Muslim worlds to be partners in the battle, and would come from Afghanistan, Iraq, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan, Yemen and many other places.

32. In the Palestinian refugee camp of Ein el-Helweh, there was continued tension and intermittent armed clashes during the reporting period, including in relation to renewed attempts at deploying the joint Palestinian security forces in all parts of the camp to contribute to the security of the camp. On 3 and 4 June, attempts by the joint force to deploy to Tiri neighbourhood, considered to be a stronghold of extremist militant Bilal Badr, triggered clashes between the force and members of the Islamist militant groups, resulting in the injury of two individuals. On 1 July, Hamas and Asbat al-Ansar, both members of the joint force, handed over to the Lebanese authorities an individual wanted for allegedly plotting terror attacks during Ramadan in Beirut and Sidon. On 17 August, an attack by extremist militants against an office of the joint force triggered a series of clashes between the force, mainly under the lead of Fatah, and extremist militants, including Bilal Abu Arqub, an ally of Bilal Badr. The clashes reportedly resulted in 8 individuals dead, with 86 others injured and an estimated 500 persons displaced, in addition to substantial material damage in the Tiri sector of the camp. A ceasefire was reached on 23 August. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) had to temporarily suspend its operations as a result of the clashes. Stray bullets also reached areas in Sidon in the vicinity of the camp. Steps were taken by the local Palestinian and Lebanese leadership in Sidon to address the round of violence, including the establishment of a security committee in the Sidon area.

33. On 24 April, clashes erupted in the Beddawi Palestine refugee camp, as the main Palestinian factions launched an operation to arrest a number of fugitives wanted by the Lebanese Armed Forces for drug trafficking and the illicit use of weapons. The next day, four suspects were handed over to the Lebanese Armed Forces, resulting in further clashes, forcing UNRWA to suspend its operations for one day. On and around 26 June, clashes occurred in Ein el-Helweh and Shatila camps, reportedly leaving 2 people dead in Shatila and a total of 10 people injured in both camps, as a result of a series of violent disputes.

34. The presence of Palestinian armed groups outside the camps also continued. Notwithstanding the decision taken in 2006 by the National Dialogue, and confirmed in subsequent sessions, to disarm Palestinian militias outside the camps within a six-month period, no progress was made during the reporting period with regard to dismantling the military bases of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command and Fatah al-Intifada in the country.

35. On 20 July, the Lebanese Working Group on Palestinian Refugees Affairs launched, under the aegis of the Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee, a document entitled "A unified Lebanese vision for the Palestinian refugees affairs in Lebanon". The document reiterates decisions taken at the National Dialogue Conference of 2006, providing for "disarming Palestinians outside the camps within a six-month period and addressing the issue of weapons inside the camps" and calls for the Government to "re-evoke the decisions of the National Dialogue Conference".

II. Observations

36. I welcome the continuous progress made by the Government on a number of key reform agendas, notably the landmark Lebanese-brokered agreement on a new electoral law, after years of failed attempts to reach a consensus. The agreement will pave the way for a renewed representation of Lebanese citizens through their elected officials. With a view to maintaining the momentum of the restoration of all Lebanese institutions to their full functionality, it will be important to hold free and fair parliamentary elections on time.

37. I hope that the same constructive spirit can be applied to a resumption of discussions on a number of outstanding issues, including the National Defence Strategy, within the framework of the National Dialogue under the leadership of the President, as a key element of progress towards addressing the issue of the presence of weapons outside the control of the State.

38. I commend the successes of the Lebanese Armed Forces against the threat of terrorism. The takeover by the Lebanese Armed Forces of areas formerly under the control of extremist elements in Ra's Baalbek and Qa' is an achievement in the restoration of the State authority and of its control over its territory. I am saddened by the deaths of the nine soldiers that had been detained by ISIL since August 2014. I am similarly saddened by the deaths of soldiers over the course of the recent operation by the Lebanese Armed Forces and the injuries to a number of others, to whom I wish a speedy recovery. The political and popular backing behind that operation shows that the Lebanese Armed Forces continue to benefit from a high level of support across the political spectrum.

39. Those successes also demonstrate the tangible impact of international efforts in building the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces and in increasing its capabilities. In that context, I welcome the sustained support provided by some Member States to the Lebanese Armed Forces. I renew my call to donors, made on 13 September, to support the Lebanese Armed Forces, including under the umbrella of the International Support Group for Lebanon, to maintain or increase their contributions or to become new contributors to the Lebanese Armed Forces. The continued commitment by Lebanon to relevant resolutions and to the guiding principles of its partnership with the international community, including the respect of international law in the conduct of military operations, is of major importance.

40. The reassertion by Lebanon of its control over some of the border posts previously manned by Hizbullah is an important step forward in the restoration by Lebanon of its authority over all its territory. Progress towards the eventual presence of the Lebanese Armed Forces along the entirety of the country's border with the Syrian Arab Republic will further that goal. In that context, and to extend the authority of the Lebanese State over its territory, political efforts to revisit the outstanding issue of the delineation and the demarcation of the border with the Syrian Arab Republic should be made, at the appropriate time, in accordance with resolution 1680 (2006). That would allow consideration to be given to new ways to ensure better control of the borders of Lebanon and to prevent the illegal transfer of weapons and movement of fighters in both directions.

41. The widespread proliferation of weapons outside the control of the State, combined with the existence of heavily armed militias, undermines the security of Lebanese citizens. The maintenance by Hizbullah of sizeable and sophisticated military capabilities outside the control of the Government of Lebanon remains a matter of grave concern. Through its operation in Arsal, Hizbullah aimed to portray itself as a provider of security against external and internal threats, a role that should be the monopoly of the State. I reiterate my calls upon all concerned to

contribute to efforts to reinforce the institutions of the Lebanese State. I also reiterate my call upon Hizbullah and all other parties concerned not to engage in any military activity inside or outside Lebanon, consistent with the requirements of the Taif Accords and resolution 1559 (2004). I continue to urge the Government and armed forces of Lebanon to take all measures necessary to prohibit Hizbullah and other armed groups from acquiring weapons and building paramilitary capacity outside the authority of the State, in violation of resolution 1559 (2004).

42. The participation of Hizbullah and other Lebanese groups in the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic is a breach of the policy of disassociation and the principles of the Baabda Declaration. It presents considerable risks to the stability of Lebanon and challenges to its sovereignty. The involvement of Hizbullah in the Syrian Arab Republic for several years is contrary to resolution 1559 (2004) and demonstrates the failure of Hizbullah to disarm and its refusal to be accountable to the State institutions that the implementation of resolution 1559 (2004) was intended to strengthen.

43. I continue to be concerned by the reported involvement of Hizbullah elsewhere, as well as that of other Lebanese elements in fighting in the region, which poses risks to the stability of Lebanon and of the region. Such activities challenge the prospect of the full implementation of resolution 1559 (2004). I call anew upon Hizbullah to step back from its involvement in the Syrian Arab Republic. I also call upon countries in the region that maintain close ties with Hizbullah to encourage the transformation of the armed group into a solely civilian political party and its disarmament, in accordance with the requirements of the Taif Accords and resolution 1559 (2004), in the best interests of Lebanon and regional peace and security.

44. The situation in some of the Palestine refugee camps remains of concern, including as it affects the regular delivery of the essential health, education, relief and social services provided by UNRWA to Palestine refugees in a challenging environment. I call on donors to continue supporting the Agency in the delivery of those services. Such efforts are without prejudice to the eventual resolution of the Palestine refugee question in the context of a comprehensive settlement in the region.

45. In Ein el-Helweh, it is of concern that violence is recurrent, and that ceasefire agreements could not be sustained. It is important that the joint security forces, as the entity in charge of security in the camp, have the support of all factions to work towards the shared goal of stability. Continuous tensions between the joint forces and extremist armed elements demonstrate the persistent risks resulting from the maintenance of unauthorized weapons outside the control of the State authority. In that regard, I encourage the Government of Lebanon to take forward the pledge of its ministerial statement of 27 December 2016 to promote the Lebanese-Palestinian dialogue to avert tensions in the camps. Particular attention should be given in that regard to the Ein el-Helweh camp. I renew my call on the Government to implement the decisions of the National Dialogue in 2006 pertaining to the disarmament of Palestinian militias, as called for by the document entitled, "A unified Lebanese vision for the Palestinian refugees affairs in Lebanon".

46. I condemn all violations of the sovereignty of Lebanon. I reiterate my call to Israel to adhere to its obligations under relevant Security Council resolutions and to withdraw its forces from the northern part of the village of Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line, and to cease immediately its overflights of Lebanese airspace, which are violations of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon, undermine the credibility of the Lebanese security services and generate anxiety among the civilian population. I continue to call upon all parties, including the

Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon and to prevent cross-border violations.

47. Lebanon successfully restored control over parts of its territory that had been used to prepare and launch terrorist actions against the country, and so addressed some of the impacts on its security emanating from the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic. The political, economic and humanitarian effects of the crisis on Lebanon, however, remain tangible. I call upon donors to support Lebanon in its response to the crisis, and to respond to the needs of refugees and host communities in particular, as they are essential for the stabilization and development of Lebanon.

48. Lebanon faces a combined opportunity of political momentum, greater security and nationwide support for its army. It is important that this opportunity be seized in order to move forward on the implementation of the outstanding provisions of resolution 1559 (2004). I therefore count on the continued commitment of the Government of Lebanon to its international obligations and call upon all parties and actors to fully abide by resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006). The United Nations will continue its efforts towards the full implementation of those and all other resolutions pertaining to Lebanon.